

SERMON – 11/8/24

Psalm 148:1-14

'Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD from the heavens...

Praise the LORD from the earth...

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens. And he has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his faithful servants, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the Lord.'

(Psalm 148:1,7,13,14)

Over the summer we have been reading and reflecting on the Psalms and particularly those which celebrate creation and the work of the Creator.

We began by thinking about the way creation itself sings God's praises in Psalm 98 – the sea resounding, the rivers clapping their hands, the mountains singing together for joy, the the stars in heaven declaring the glory of God. Perhaps creation uses no words to praise the Lord but there is no question but that God is honoured from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, and we are without excuse if we fail to recognise that hand of the Creator in all that is around us.

We also reflected on how the eternal God is revealed in Psalm 102 in the passing of time, with every year, every century, every hour and every moment pregnant with the presence of God and with the invitation of God to us to transcend our mortality and enter into life everlasting through Christ.

We were joined one Sunday by Richard Gibb from Loch Leven Church who helped us to recognise the care of God the Good Shepherd in the 23rd Psalm and another Sunday Irene McFarlane took us through Psalm 139 in which we are reminded that God knows everything about us from the womb to the grave and is present with us whether we riding the crest of the wave or plumbing the depths of sadness.

The last couple of weeks we have homed in on the very personal connection that our Creator longs to have with each one of us – in Psalm 8 we marvelled that the One who shaped the universe is

mindful of you and me and in Psalm 24 we heard the God of all the earth extending an invitation to us to draw near, and inviting us to invite Him in the Person of Jesus to make His home in our hearts.

There is so much in the Psalms to bring us to our knees in worship and as we come to the end of this summer series by looking today at Psalm 148, I want to emphasise the fact that the Creator is worthy of all praise and to encourage you all to hold nothing back in offering praise from the very depth of your soul as we seek to join with all heaven and earth in the ceaseless song of worship with its focus on the Lord Jesus Christ that makes sense of everything and that is the culmination of all things as we heard in that second reading from the Book of Revelation.

The opening question of the Shorter Catechism famously asks: 'What is the chief end of man?' (In other words, What are we all here for?) That is a question that has exercised human beings from time immemorial. It is the question that gives rise to all religion and philosophy and that is the inspiration and motivation for everything from sport to music and the arts, from the quest for knowledge and understanding that prompts scientific enquiry to the desire to care for the needy.

The answer given in the Catechism is this: 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.' For our Christian faith offers to the world the premise that the entire significance of human existence is caught up in the basic human need to reach out for and to worship One greater than ourselves and the offer that is held out to us by God through Jesus Christ not only to stand in awe of the Almighty but to enter into a relationship with the divine that brings perfect fulfilment to our deepest longings.

The psalmist paints a vast picture as he pours out his praise. 'Praise the Lord!' are the words with which he opens and concludes. In Hebrew they are Hallelujah. And caught up in this worship on a cosmic scale are half the psalm focussed on the praise of God offered from the heavens and half the psalm focussed on the praise of God offered from the earth. The heavenly worship is both spiritual and physical, angelic and stellar – on the one hand angels and all the heavenly host, who we are told in the Book of Revelation never stop praising day and night

the One who was and who is and who is to come, and the sun, moon and stars which are so much greater than anything we can truly contemplate here under the skies. But no less important than the heavenly worship is an utterly comprehensive expression of worship from here on earth – from inanimate mountains, hills and ocean depths, lightning, hail, snow and clouds and stormy winds, to living things from fruit trees and cedars to small creatures, flying birds and great sea creatures, not to mention human beings from kings and princes and all rulers to young men and women, old men and children. There is nothing that does not have the capacity to offer praise to the Creator, from the greatest force that can be harnessed to the tiniest sub-atomic particle.

If you ever get the chance to visit Dunblane Cathedral give yourself an hour or two to sit and contemplate the four huge Louis Davis stained glass windows along the south side of the choir. They depict the words of an ancient song of praise based on this Psalm and on words in the Book of Daniel in which every corner of creation is exhorted to praise the Lord. "Oh you works of the Lord bless the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever." The stunning windows in vibrant colours focus on the heavens and the earth, on humanity and even on chaos where such things as scorching winds and bitter cold are exhorted to bless the Lord and to praise Him and magnify Him for ever. Memorably etched in to a scene of ice and snow are the names of Captain Robert Scott and his team who perished on their quest to reach the South Pole in 1912 just as the window was being designed.

But it is perhaps that which leads us into the ultimate message not only of this Psalm unfolded in the closing verses, but of the Gospel itself, namely that while the Creator is worthy of all praise, God is not only to be worshipped but to be known. God's splendour is '*above* the earth and the heavens' (v.13) but He can be known by name. In the Old Testament the name by which He could be known was the LORD - written in Hebrew with the letters YHWH an abbreviated version of I AM who I AM and sometimes pronounced Yahweh – but in the fulness of the times God sent His Son Jesus into the world, born of a woman, born that we may be adopted as children of God and invited to call Him Abba, Daddy, Father.

It is to the coming of the Messiah that the closing verse of the Psalm refers: “[The LORD] has raised up for His people a horn (that is a symbol of strength and deliverance), the praise of all his faithful servants.” (v.14) These faithful servant are those who have accepted God's invitation not just to worship Him from a distance but to know Him and to love Him, not just to glorify Him but to enjoy Him for ever. For this is the desire of God for His creation, that all things should be reconciled to Him in Christ and be made complete.

As the apostle Paul writes: “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil2:11) and as we read from the Book of Revelation, ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!’ (Rev.5:12,13)

As in all things, Christ is the key, and it is to Him that we must look if we are to make sense of that question: What is man's chief end? What are we here for? We are here to glorify God by lifting our voices with the whole created order – with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, with sun, moon and stars, with mountains and hills and rivers and seas and all that is in them, with all creatures great and small, with lightning, hail, snow, clouds and wind, with the greatest and the least of humanity – but to lead the way by our own free choice, acknowledging Jesus Christ to be the image of the invisible God, the One in whom and through whose death on the cross for us we may come to know God and enter into fellowship with God for ever.

Let worship be your every breath. God is near. God is love. Praise the Lord.

After a closing prayer, let me invite you to keep a moment of stillness before the Lord - offer the worship of your deepest being to the Lord of creation and know that through Jesus you are invited to draw close and call God 'Abba, Father.' Be still.